

GRAHAM JARVIS 1930-2003

A character in life and work

Toronto-born actor played supporting roles in hundreds of films and TV shows, including the cult-hit sitcom *Mary Hartman*

BY BILL GLADSTONE

As a genial, six-foot, balding performer who wore a trademark mustache and glasses, Graham Jarvis was not the leading-man type. The Toronto-born actor from a privileged background, who died last month in California at 72, courted but never achieved stardom and instead gained a kind of small-roles fame by appearing in hundreds of supporting parts in film and television productions.

Mr. Jarvis took character parts in films as diverse as *Alice's Restaurant*, *Cold Turkey*, *Middle Age Crazy*, *Silkwood* and *Misery*, and a similar assortment of television shows including *Star Trek*, *ER*, *Murder She Wrote*, *Gunsmoke*, *The X-Files* and *Six Feet Under*.

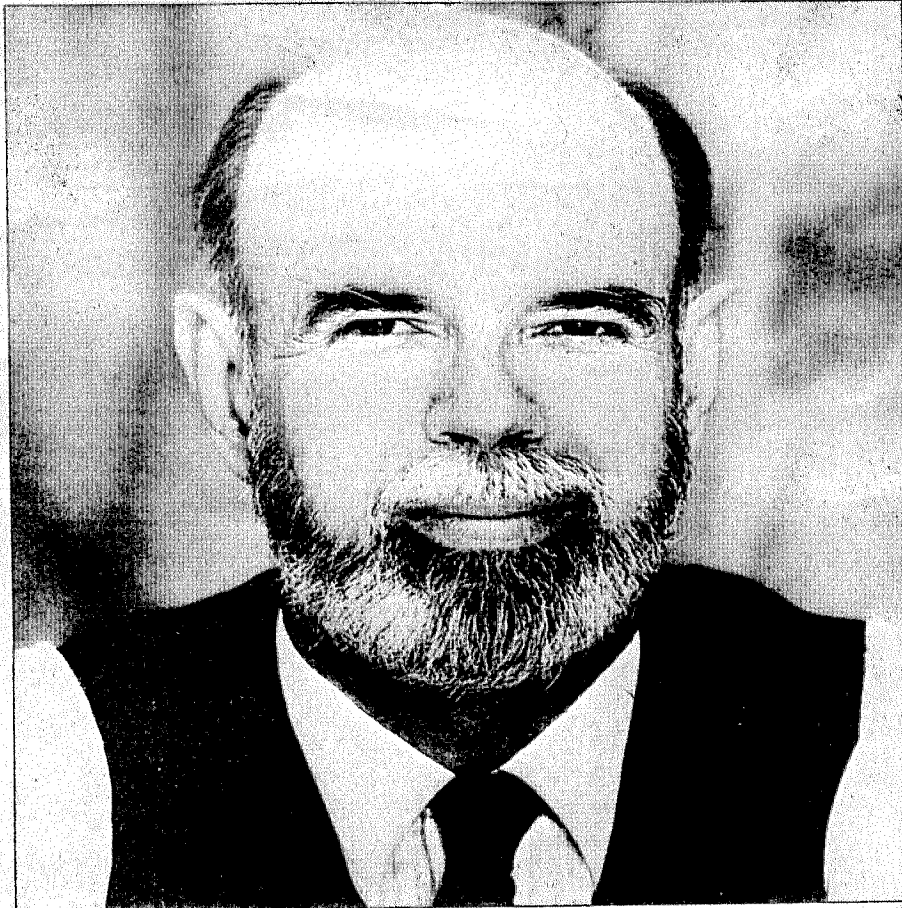
His first role was as an understudy in a mid-1950s Broadway production of Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending*, and his last was as the grandfather in an episode of the TV series *Seventh Heaven*, which aired four days after his death in April.

He is perhaps best known for his portrayal of Charlie Haggars, the devoted husband of a country singer in the 1970s TV sitcom *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. "Nobody outside the business knows my name, but it doesn't bother me," he told an interviewer in 1982. "Fans still know me as Charlie, years after we went off the air. Fans went nuts over that character for some reason and I love the guy myself."

A scion of the historic Toronto family for whom Jarvis Street is named, Graham Powely Jarvis was also the grandson of John Labatt Jr., who built up the famous Labatt brewery. A strain of theatrical talent obviously runs in the Labatt blood: His cousins include two legendary theatre personalities — nonagenarian actor Hume Cronyn and Broadway producer Robert Whitehead, who died last year.

It was Mr. Whitehead who helped Mr. Jarvis attain the gig in *Orpheus Descending* and an audition at the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Va., where he trained for three seasons. Mr. Cronyn also helped him land a Broadway role, Mr. Jarvis said in 1982, adding that he rarely liked to mention the celebrated theatrical connections within his own family.

"This is the first time I've let this



Graham Jarvis: 'You'd be having a conversation with him and he'd just don a role,' said his niece.

information out because I've tried not to trade on it," he said. "But I guess I've been around long enough now not to worry about it."

His father, an investment banker who was instrumental in founding what is today known as Scotia McLeod and was later president of Labatt, moved the family to New York when Graham was 5. He was sent to Bishop Ridley College, a prep school in St. Catharines, Ont., and later to Williams College in Williamstown, Mass. A confused dropout at 23, he found work on the midnight shift in a penny arcade on 42nd Street in Manhattan. Then a friend invited him to watch an off-Broadway troupe in rehearsal and a light went on in his head. "I can do that!" he told himself, and he never looked back.

"Graham was such a great character actor because he could just go into character," said his niece, Sandra Jarvis of Toronto. "He was

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just brilliant that way. You'd be having a conversation with him and he'd just don a role, and it would take you a second to realize that Graham was now acting. Anyone who knew him well could just see this glow in his eyes — this glint that told you he knew he was having fun with you."

"He loved acting," said his friend, actor Wil Albert. "When he

was acting he was like a little boy going to the candy store."

Mr. Jarvis was a graduate of the American Theatre Wing acting school as well as of the Barter Theatre. He was an original member of the Lincoln Center Repertory Theater and a veteran of many Broadway and off-Broadway productions.

His first film role (in *Bye Bye Brauerman*, 1968) enticed him to move to Hollywood, and he soon landed the part of the narrator in the stage production of *The Rocky Horror Show* at the Roxy Theatre on Sunset Boulevard.

Television producer Norman Lear spotted him there and eventually recommended him for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. Mr. Jarvis also appeared in the show's sequel, *Forever Fernwood*. Another memorable role was of John Erlichman in *Blind Ambition*, a well-received 1979 TV miniseries about the Watergate political scandal.

Relishing the idea of free airfare

to Toronto where he had family and friends, Mr. Jarvis took occasional work from the CBC. Former CBC producer Ross McLean once told of auditioning him as a talk-show host, but felt his bald dome would need to be covered. Mr. Jarvis owned a hairpiece but had left it in California.

"Makeup pulled 20-odd rugs out of storage," Mr. McLean wrote. "Everything he tried on looked absurdly out of place." Ultimately, Mr. Jarvis arranged for his L.A. agent to go to his house, find the hairpiece and rush it to Toronto.

"The rug made it on time," Mr. McLean noted, adding that "I have rarely seen a less convincing thatch of regrouped Hong Kong hair." In short, Graham Jarvis looked best — and did the CBC audition — as himself.

In a 1980s TV series called *Making the Grade*, Mr. Jarvis played a buck-passing, inner-city high-school principal who didn't care that a student couldn't read. In real life, however, he worked as a volunteer to teach literacy skills to young offenders.

"It was really fascinating to hear him talk about it," said his wife, JoAnna. "He felt they couldn't read because they couldn't speak — they were speaking a street patois. He went back to college to get his teaching certificate so he could do this on a regular basis." Active in civic politics, he pushed for handgun control and helped voters get to the polls on election day. He also sang in his church choir and worked in its Sunday school.

"I think the consensus among almost everyone who knew Graham is that he was a very warm, enjoyable man," said actor Jerry Hardin, a friend for almost 50 years.

"You came away feeling he was a good human being if you had any contact with him. He was very empathetic. He had compassion for people's difficulties and problems, and he would help them if he could."

Friends and family also recall his storytelling skills and his joy at giving visitors detailed historical tours of New York and later Hollywood. By all accounts, he was a humble man.

"He didn't think he was nearly as successful as he was," said Barbara Warren, a niece. "He was always extremely surprised and delighted when people would stop him on the street and ask him for his autograph."

"He loved to deliver the line and get the shock on your face, Ms. Warren said. "You never saw him poise himself, he just walked right in as if he was that person."

Mr. Jarvis died at his home in the Pacific Palisades area of Los Angeles on April 16. Besides his wife, JoAnna, he leaves sons Matthew and Alex in California and a sister Kitty Blair in Toronto.

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